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AT OUR REQUEST MR. JOHN GELLATLY, WHO KINDLY LENT US HIS "GLORIA" AND "THE MUSICIAN," FURNISHED US WITH THE FOLLOWING APPRECIATION OF MR. DEWING'S WORK

"GLORIA" AND "THE MUSICIAN" BY THOMAS W. DEWING

(See colored frontispiece and page 189)

A WATER-COLOR, a water-color that won no prize in a Prang Christmas card competition—is there an American painter less likely to be suggested by such a contest than Dewing? Yet a Dewing is what this water-color reproduced as our frontispiece is—one of the four which are all he has ever done in this medium. It dates, so the records tell us, from 1884, and its more general date is youth. There is youth in its generous memory, almost a worshiping memory of the Botticelli frescoes in the Louvre; youth, too, in the key of color, in the higher tone bright and spring-like which he was trying here before he discovered, much later, his true autumnal self.

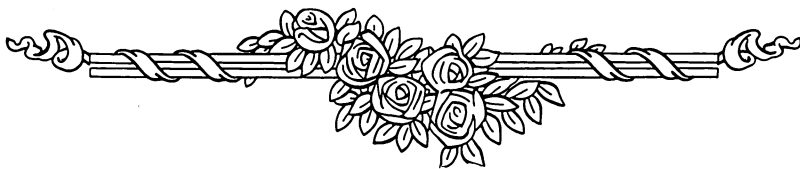
But the youth is special; it is youth with a difference. Although this picture "Gloria" may in comparison with his later work appear at first to approach prettiness, yet a second glance reveals it approaching only to stop short, saved from prettiness as from softness by the swiftness and delicate certainty of the lines of the haloes, by the precision with delicacy of the flowers and harps, by crispness of the wing feathers, by a sensitiveness which perceives with exactness differences in tactile values. Even in 1884, almost thirty-five years ago, Dewing could paint with sure dexterity the difference between the curve of a feather's edge and the softer curve of a petal, could make harp strings so incisive and sharp that we knew their music would be of the clearest. How could a picture be pretty in which the curves so tend to and search for the straight line? When he was painting these four girl-angels in their radiance, with their unconventional thinking faces, he cared for the flat planes of their arms, he cared for bone structure and length of line, he was already in love with the distinction of restraint.

Curious, to any one who cares to see here the likenesses and unlikenesses to later Dewings, is the degree to which he has filled this picture, where nearly every inch is occupied, where there is barely room for an occasional bit of dim, night-blue sky. Curious, too, the success with which he has filled it, so as to achieve an effect, to leave an impression of stillness. Most curious and interesting, that the young painter who knew so well how to fill without crowding should have become the maturer master who holds and charms us with his later emptier spaces, as necessary to his picture, as organic and structural, as the woman, the chair, the musical instrument.

Love of these spaces informs the other picture "The Musician" reproduced here. In this late Dewing, painted not long ago, one could dust under the violoncello, one could walk between this seated figure and the wall, unless, to be sure, one were afraid of obtruding himself into the shimmering atmosphere of this Dewing room. For who could help looking inelegant, unchosen, beside the figure of this woman, drooped on her hard New England chair in what Dewing reveals to us as a special grace of fatigue? Her shoulder drops from the pit of the neck; her hands fall tired; her knees welcome the relief of having no longer to press the violoncello between them, while she is still thinking of the music, still uplifted. Dewing's desire here to avoid all the known poses of grace, like his constant desire to steer clear of the obviously beautiful, of the first-comer's loveliness, is satisfied always by what he actually sees in nature. Outside nature his dislike of her popularity and facility never takes him. What his avoidances and impatiences have led him to seek in nature more and more is something which no one else has found, a grace of sparseness, an ascetic eloquence, an astringent loveliness which are Dewing's own. If his art were speech, its charm would flower in "lovely words." Is it this respect for nature, or is it a preference deeper still, which compels him, although his finish is not so close as when he painted "Gloria," although his handling is looser and free, never to leave anything unfinished? Thayer will leave places unfinished purposely, consciously, depending on the help he knows he shall get from the right spectators. Dewing never does. By the law of his own art he shirks nothing, slights nothing, never relies on giving anything a fragmentary, ruined look.

In "The Musician" you see his aims and his affections, which are never opposed, always in harmony, always working together, always forming one whole. How he aims at absolute truth of values, how he loves the line that gets lost in shadow and atmosphere—only to be found again, sharp as nature, in light! Were all his other pictures destroyed "The Musician" would still tell us of a painter whose irregularities are not irregularities but hidden curves, whose dislike of sweetness and obvious rhythm led him to give us subtlety in their stead, and who loved austerity as one loves a person.

Ezra Tharp





Owned by John Gellatly, Esq.

"THE MUSICIAN"

BY THOMAS W. DEWING

(See page 188)



GLORIA

From a Water Color Drawing by Thomas W. Dewing